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LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE.

FRANCE.

Twenty years ago when M. le Comte d'Haussonville received M. Alexandre Dumas fils at the French Academy, the audience were surprised to find M. Dumas a trifle insignificant, in spite of his talents, and apparently unfortunate in having sought success in the criticism of the Chimène and Rodrigue of Corneille. The fine irony, the distinction of style, the justness of judgment displayed on this occasion, did not emanate from him. The man of the world, with his qualities of race and his experience of public affairs, won the victory over the professional writer in this pleasant academic bout.

Yesterday, again, the presentation of M. Albert Sorel afforded us a similar spectacle. At the outset a diplomat, M. Sorel is now a professor. To judge solely by his last discourse, philosophers will doubtless be of opinion that he is far from exhibiting the qualities which marked the work of M. Taine, his eminent predecessor. Besides, his rhetoric is a trifle apparent, and is redolent of the methods of the schools. With M. le duc de Broglie, it cannot be gainsaid, the judgments are more precise, the phrase is valued less for itself than for its substance. The language, both in the eulogy and in the criticism, is facile and measured. The statesman lifts us without effort to that elevated plane where, if it is not possible to grasp things individually under the best points of view, one at least obtains a better and more satisfactory survey of the whole. On this occasion again the statesman eclipsed the scholar, the man of the world the man of the study.

I could go back even to the *Correspondence* of Voltaire and

Frederick the Great, of which Sainte-Beuve remarked that of the two, Frederick showed not less *esprit* than Voltaire, while in many respects he was his superior. My object in these parallels is to deprecate neither literature nor scholarship. I am thinking merely, that we are too prone—at least in France—to restrict genius to the province of letters, and to confine the human intellect to a narrow field of action, in which it does not always completely express itself. Words are not all, and even literature is a trumpery matter, when unleavened by the breath of life. There have been admirable writers who were not authors by profession. The rules of our French Academy, therefore, in spite of the strictures they have evoked, were wise in calling to its assembly-halls, statesmen, soldiers, and even noblemen, who have not made a business of wielding the pen. The Academy, in this way, wins qualities and a prestige which would otherwise be lacking to it. One may foresee, without difficulty, on reading the discourse of M. le duc de Broglie, all of whose opinions, however, I do not share, that none of our recent academicians—as M. Brunetière or M. Jules Lemaître—is ever likely to speak in his manner.

Can it be said, now, that M. Taine has been fully appraised in these two discourses? I hardly think so. M. Sorel has not successfully grasped him ; he has displayed his dispersion only at the sacrifice of being dispersed himself. M. de Broglie has, beyond a doubt, comprehended him better, contrasting in the illustrious deceased the character of the artist with that of the philosopher, his imagination oftentimes extravagant, with his logic, which is often strained. It appears, in places, as if the figure of M. Taine emerged from these appreciations, diminished and dwarfed. His weakness, in my opinion, was an exaggerated anxiety about form, strengthened by his education at the Ecole Normale. He has given way more than once to the illusory ambition of accomplishing by words what was left unaccomplished by the thought and of illuminating by the light of words ideas without which the words are dark. I do not assert, of course, that the drapery does not conceal a robust body ; I merely reproach him with a certain labored virtuosity, which does not always stand his philosophy in good stead. He abhorred the lan-

guage of Comte, one of his philosophical masters, and perhaps did not love overmuch that of M. Guizot, who evoked in him the inspiration of the historian. Both, however, left signal works, which it has not been his destiny to rival.

Taine was above all a psychologist. His cardinal doctrine must be sought for in his work *De l'Intelligence*, which is his chief performance. He has exercised by this book a decisive influence on the French school for twenty-five years. His error,—and others have followed him in it,—is in my judgment his seeking in psychology the key to history, and his believing it possible to reduce sociology to a study of individuals or even of races.

“Fundamentally,” he wrote to me, in a letter in 1883, on the subject of an article which had appeared in the Review edited by M. Littré, “the historical school to which I belong has extensive analogies with the positivist school of which you seem to be an adherent. I say ‘fundamentally,’ because if we take the social and political theories of Comte our conclusions are opposed. He did not love the details of history, nor psychological criticism, and these, in my opinion, are our only means of penetrating into the inner recesses of souls, and of observing individual and collective passions, which are the real causes of events.” Taine set great store by a richly-stocked palette in his portraiture of events by their actors; but he was debarred by just this procedure from all explanation of their movement and real concatenation. He raised an auxiliary method to the rank of a constructive method.

The reader will be kind enough not to take my remarks for aught else than a testimony of my profound regard for an eminent mind. Discussion magnifies the living, continues the dead. Concerning this nice point of historical method, on which I have just touched, I have expressed myself at length in my last *Correspondence*. The brief lines of Taine which I have extracted from my papers, appear to me to show forth with remarkable distinctness the motive principle of his literary, historical, and social criticism. We know what has been added to it since, by M. Tarde and M. Le Bon. But with all that has been done, it by no means follows, that the opposite method is dead—which consists in deducing from the study

of large historical *ensembles* (a study which does not at all exclude details or psychological criticism) general laws of evolution which will enable us to predict events and will secure a sure foundation for practice.

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M. EMILE DURKHEIM, who presides over the department of sociology in the Faculté des Lettres at Bordeaux, publishes *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*.¹ He takes a stand in this work in opposition rather to M. Tarde and the psychological school than to the positivist school. What he really aims at is the remodelling and completion of the work of Comte and Spencer. He agrees with Comte on the one essential point, that society is a fact *sui generis* which transcends biology. The object of social science is said to be that new "thing" which results from association and which assumes, therefore, the character of a system of action common to, and imposed upon, all the members of a society. It will be necessary in the future to study it from without, without regard for its repercussions in the consciousness of the individual, or for individual modes of thought.

This, M. Durkheim tells us, is what Comte sought after. But he did not remain loyal to his own method. He saw in society a course of individual development, and thus, in spite of himself, let psychology have the last say. We revert by this road to the common error of thinking that the facts of society have value only in and through our ideas, which would then constitute the proper matter of sociology. In fact, Comte did, adds M. Durkheim, make the idea of progress the object of his sociology, defining social evolution by the idea he himself had of it. Now, without contesting the empirical worth of the "law of the three stages," it is legitimate, runs his conclusion, to say that the sociologist is not called upon to busy himself, as Comte did, with the direction of evolution, but has merely to seek out the definite causal relationship between antecedent phenomena and consequent phenomena.

Certainly, it would be unjust to assert that neither Comte nor

¹F. Alcan, publisher.

Spencer had in view the explication of the present by the past. But in addition to Comte's limiting his attention to the study of the mental factor, he further committed, according to M. Durkheim, as Pascal did, the error of crowding humanity into a single line of growth, of representing progress as that of a single people, "to which all the consecutive modifications observed in diverse populations could be ideally referred." M. Durkheim has proposed, accordingly, as a means of avoiding this mistake, to discover what he calls *social species*, which shall serve as intermediary links between the confused multitude of historical societies and the simple but ideal concept of humanity. We should obtain, in such a way, if I understand the thought of the author, abstract morphological types, calculated to represent and symbolise the concrete types in all features that are essential; and by studying the concomitant variations of these types, in other words, by the employment of the comparative method, we should arrive at last at a scientific explanation of the phenomenon.

M. Durkheim has, in my judgment, entered on the only path that is likely to lead to the establishment of a sociology. The methods lauded by Taine and Tarde have proved incompetent. Not that M. Durkheim's thought is always clear, nor his exuberant dialectics without pitfalls. He gets entangled, for example, in the relations of "generality" with "normality," and in the pages where he treats of criminology he boggles at the explanation of a difficulty which is simply the outcome of his own definitions. He has reached a theory of the social utility of crime, a point on which M. Tarde will no doubt make short work of him. M. Durkheim might have spared himself these petty vexations, had he simply pointed out the causes which are calculated to augment criminality in a society in many respects apparently progressing, and had he avoided also attaching an absolute value to that rather lax expression, *inferior* or *superior* social types. He appears to have forgotten, in fine, that medical pathology affords an auxiliary discipline—as, for that matter, all psychology does—which can render material assistance in comprehending the facts of social pathology.

Unfortunately, M. Durkheim impoverishes sociology by his

attempt to delimit it. I must reproach him, particularly, with having miscomprehended, in his exaggerated fear of "subjectivism," which he throws up to Comte, the phenomenon, so evident in history, of the incorporation of grand intellectual states in every social fabric. Would it not be easy to show, for example, that the present constitution of France is in many respects the expression of the metaphysical mode of thought which triumphed with the French Revolution? The study of the fact of *property* is, truly enough, a different thing from the "psychology of the property-owner!" But how can M. Durkheim believe that the evolutionary drift of a period has such scant significance? Does not every "relation of causality" in the social scale imply at the same time the intervention of individuals (the passions of the parties interested, the motives of legislators, etc.) and a certain tendency, or orientation, of the event itself?

To consider the social phenomenon in its entirety, without arbitrarily eliminating any element of it; to distinguish in it grand classes of facts, economical, juridical, political, and intellectual; to study in each of these classes the more special facts, such as property, the family, marriage, religion, etc.; to examine how these different facts influence one another, how they become modified as a whole or successively; to seek out the individual modifications which they may present in the different familiar historical series, and to make allowance in all cases for the variations that are incident to race, geographical environment, etc.; to discover an evolutionary drift for particular facts and general classes of facts; to trace out a scheme of their correlative evolution which shall render *prevision* and practical action possible,—such seems to me to be the object of a system of sociology. It is clear that the comparative method is its means of procedure, and that all the aids offered by the other sciences are to be placed in its service.

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In *La cité moderne, métaphysique de la sociologie*,¹ M. JEAN IZOULET gives us the first volume of a large work treating of the "recon-

¹ F. Alcan, publisher.

ciliation of the religious soul with the scientific mind." In this aspect it will interest the readers of *The Monist* and *The Open Court*. In the present volume, M. Izoulet studies the question in its philosophical aspect; he proposes in the forthcoming parts to study it in its historical aspect (Christianity and the Revolution), and in its political aspect (the Church and the State). One is a little dismayed at the undue bulk of this book, which takes up nearly seven hundred pages, and could readily bear condensation. One must censure the author also for a certain obscurity of style, the indiscriminate use of italics, and a perpetual division of the text into paragraphs, which distract the eye and break the chain of reasoning. We shall observe, however, that he is a man of sincerity and ardent faith. The guiding thought of his work is to trace psychology and morals to biological conditions, to found a psychology and system of ethics which shall be "bio-social," such that man shall no longer be considered as an independent ego, individual or animal, but as a solid whole, a member of a "city" or community. Man *is* not but *becomes*—in æsthetics, morals, and in thought—according as he passes from animality to humanity. This idea is not new; it has been largely exploited by Spencer, who is also not its discoverer; it is a familiar conception to nearly all of us, and all of us have already made some application of it. M. Izoulet might have mentioned many precursors in his line of thought. His originality consists rather in the application which he has made of the principle of association to the study of philosophical problems; which must not be taken to mean that he has absolutely solved them.

Nothing could be better than to eliminate happiness and personal welfare from ethics. "*I! I!* That is the eternal shibboleth of mystical ethics. It will take a long time to accustom Western peoples to the bio-social conception, conformably to which that full expansion of energies which is life and felicity can be procured to individuals only in and by a just association. . . . *I! my reward, for myself, here and now!* But have a care, poor people, you are entangled in the cog-wheels of the social organisation. That insight will make you wise." Without doubt. But that old truth does not prevent individuals from being profoundly sensible of misery, each

on his own account ; the collective consciousness does not abolish the individual consciousness, and, accordingly, the sacrifice of the individual in the interest of the whole, well grounded as it may be as a matter of reason, remains none the less painful as a matter of feeling.

M. Izoulet is desirous of reconciling the mechanism with the end. Man, he says, is not the geometrical centre of things ; but he remains, nevertheless, the optical centre, and, judging by himself of all the rest, he discovers in all places meaning and finality. "Mechanism is the outward view ; finalism is the inward view." At last, from the fusion of adverse doctrines we see emerge "finalistic monism or science pervaded with religion, or physics pervaded with metaphysics, or nature pervaded with God." True again. Nor is it a recent attempt of philosophy to integrate quality and quantity in the concept of the universe. But we shall never be able to do so except by an artifice of the mind ; that artifice, necessary as it is, leaves remaining, nevertheless, the immediate awareness of the ego and the non-ego, and the very finality which we impose on things is at once contradicted by the mechanism which things impose on us. The strangest error of M. Izoulet is that he flatters himself he has avoided agnosticism by substituting the word *incomprehensible* for the word *unknowable*. He wants man to *see* what he does not *understand*. But that *incomprehensible*, that thing or phantom which escapes our grasp, does it not reduce philosophy to the very dualism which it sought to escape from by it ? Is not this tantamount again to distinguishing between two different or heterogeneous species of "unknowable" things, and would it not be more correct to say that if all is *knowable*, what is always left is the *unknown* ?

I might review thus several problems, and the same conclusion would be established everywhere, that the antinomies which they reveal can only be resolved by considering the terms as simple logical attitudes of the mind which has posited them. They are our way even of comprehending and feeling ; they stand for the forms of our sensuous existence and understanding. The moment we transplant them without ourselves and hypostatise them, we create

a spiritualism, a materialism, an idealism, etc. But the criticism of these systems carries us back at once to the necessity of our nature, to our necessary mental condition; this it behooves us to know, to make precise—and finally to accept. Monism is that unification of phenomena which cloaks the unnoticed but inevitable artifice of the mind.

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I wish to point out in closing a more modest work by the late M. ALFRED DUMESNIL,—*Libre*.¹ M. Dumesnil was neither a professional philosopher nor a professional writer. He passed his youth in the intimate society of illustrious men, and devoted the rest of his life to the culture of plants, to the “*culture sans terre*,” which has been so much spoken of. He belonged to that fine group of men born under the Empire and the Restoration, which accounted as its friend Eugène Noel, who is still living, and the sweet and noble Jean Macé, who has just died. I am glad to say that I have enjoyed, although somewhat late, the friendship of these two last-mentioned men, who have both written such refined and charming works. M. Dumesnil, like them, had preserved that “superior sense of existence” of which no trace is left in our morbid literature. *Libre* is rather a collection of thoughts than a book. But the author has grouped his thoughts under the following characteristic titles: “Self-refuge,” “The Support of the Individual,” “The Consolations of Nature,” “The Consciousness of Life,” and “The Expansion of the Individual.” The basis of his belief is spiritualism as properly understood, and the bent of his mind a species of stoicism which does not isolate the individual from humanity. M. Dumesnil adheres to the immortality of the soul, which he does not understand, however, in the strict religious sense. But that matters little if we do not share his particular faith. It suffices that his book reveals in every page an upright and sincere soul, and that we may gather here a veritable bouquet of thoughts and maxims which are among the very best.

PARIS.

LUCIEN ARRÉAT.

¹ Lemerre, publisher, 1895.